

October

Sixty-six goddamn years old and as stupid as a skinned fish. He reeled his line in too quickly, and the hook caught the corner of his mouth. A few stars began to pulse their light across the pink-bronze sky. They seemed to vibrate with laughter. *Fucking assholes.*

Without hesitation, he ripped the hook from his skin. He winced slightly, then lit a cigarette. Too annoyed to bother carrying it back to his condemnation-worthy trailer, he dropped his fishing rod on the slick rocks surrounding the edge of the pond. His Crocs sunk in the grass as he trundled home. A heavy rain had fallen the day before, leaving more water than the earth could soak up.

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"I'm soaking wet," she declared as she entered his trailer with a broom. "I brought this so maybe we won't raise dust the next time we fuck, you filthy slob."

"Is it raining?" he asked, tilting an ear toward the ceiling. He stood at the counter making fish tacos, facing away from the door. In an attempt to keep the mood nonchalant, he told her, "I caught a couple fat ones this morning."

"October, I'm going to need help drying off."

Her scathing tone was enough to make him turn around. His girlfriend of three weeks stood across the room from him without a shred of clothing on her body. The shock made his body slow to react.

The week before, they swam in the pond out back. When they got out of the water, her nipples hardened enough to be seen through the fabric of her bikini. She caught him staring and screamed that he was a perv and would never see her again. Yet there she was, butt ass naked in front of him. He noticed how smoothly her body curved from shoulders to hips to toes, and his cock finally grew.

"What took you so long, huh?" she demanded, slithering close enough that their chests touched. Her

palm slammed against his cheek with enough force to land a spray of saliva on the window above the sink.

“Am I not pretty enough for you? Is that it? You think I’m ugly?”

“No . . . you’re stunning, absolutely stunning . . .” He’d never felt his cock throb with such an immense desire. A strange keening sound bubbled from the back of his throat.

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As October’s foot landed on the first step leading to the porch, he heard a strange noise come from beneath it.

“Hello?” he called in a hoarse voice. Fifty-six years of smoking did that to a man, corroded the cords until they almost didn’t exist. Peering through the gaps between the steps, he saw something crawling toward him through the muck. “Come here.” He reached for it, grasping a small, shivering body covered in slickened fur. He ripped his wife beater from his skin in one pull and carried the animal inside. Gray puddles saturated the dingy, threadbare carpet. He wrapped the tattered fabric of his shirt around the noisy little creature. “Warm. You should be warm. Right?”

It responded with a pitiful sound of discomfort.

“You’re lucky I heard you.” You’d be dead. Should I be dead?

He sat on the couch, delicately avoiding the broken springs. He had no desire to be Jack bobbing to and fro from his box again. Although, the surgeon *was* nice enough to give him the piece of removed rectum in a jar of formaldehyde, which he kept beside his bed with a green Post-It reminding him not to eat it.

The little animal shifted in his lap. He looked down, noticing for the first time it was a calico kitten with a pure white head. She crawled up to his shoulder, nestling against his warm, abundantly fleshy neck. He decided to name her Baby. *Where’s my baby?*

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“I’m not keeping it,” she said, taking a significant swig of whiskey without a grimace.

“I will,” he replied, grabbing the bottle. He dumped its contents down the sink. “But there will be no baby for me to keep if you don’t take care of yourself.”

“I’m. Not. Keeping. It.”

“I just told you I want to keep it. I’ll raise it myself.”

"You think I'm carrying a baby inside me for nine months just for you? You shouldn't credit yourself so much, October. I'm getting rid of it."

"No, please," he begged. He dropped to his knees in front of her recliner and gently pressed his palms against her abdomen. "Please don't kill my baby."

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The sound of a hungry tummy overcame her soothing purr. October carefully got to his feet and walked the few steps to the kitchen area. Mold sprawled across the paneled walls like ivy, stemming from the putrid bathroom at the back of the trailer. Still cradling the kitten in the folds of his neck, October grabbed a can of tuna and cracked it open. Baby sprang from his shoulder instantly, skidded a little on the white-tiled counter, and sucked the fish into her mouth as if she were a living vacuum.

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"Tomorrow," she told him. The corners of her chapped lips lifted in an evil smile as she listened to his sobs. The sound coursed through her veins like blood, only better. She felt goose bumps on her arms and shivered. "They'll suck it right out with a little vacuum." She didn't know if that was true, but he believed it; he threw himself on the ground in front of her feet and wrapped his beefy hands around her thin ankles.

"It's murder, Sunny."

"What're you talking about? I'll be good as new. You can even have your birthday sex if you're a good boy."

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The only sound left was a soft trickle as the rain tried to find a place to go. He saw a shimmering moon through the patchy roof, so he scooped Baby up and trod to the bedroom—the only dry room in the entire trailer. She was still licking her lips when he drifted to sleep.

It's October first, he thought before his eyelids even opened. Keeping them pressed together, he spoke the news aloud. Baby offered a tiny meow. He could feel her curled in the crook of his arm. She meowed again, louder.

"Yes, I know. Food." October grunted as he sat up in bed, and pulled Baby to his chest for a hug. She licked his chin.

It had been thirty years since he'd eaten on an October first, but this year he actually felt hungry. Feeling sentimental, he went for overcooked bacon, Lay's potato chips, a can of Busch, and a cigarette. He put a crumbled piece of bacon on top of Baby's tuna. *Happy Birthday to me.* And for the first time in thirty years, he meant it.

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"Baby, this way," October said, gently pulling her leash. They continued their walk through town as October observed the costumed kids racing from door to door. It'd been a few years since he'd last come out to watch. A burning cigarette bobbed in the corner of his mouth.

"Hey, mister! Can I pet your cat?" A boy dressed as a dinosaur ran up to them. Startled, Baby arched her back.

"Give her a minute; she thinks you're a real dino." October smiled, bent to pick her up, and held her in one arm. The exertion left him coughing. His cigarette tumbled to the sidewalk, and Baby licked the crease between his thumb and forefinger. He ran his free hand across his bald head as he stamped the embers. *I need to quit anyway.* "Go ahead now," he rasped to the boy, who quickly patted the spot between her ears before taking off again.

The sun was beginning to set, so October started the mile-long walk back home with Baby comfortably lounging in his arm. When they had one last field to cross, October took off her collar and let her jump down. She liked to chase the mice, and she knew how to get home once she was done. Baby scampered off, and October went to sit in the fraying camouflage camping chair on the porch. He observed for the first time that the porch was lopsided, tilting quite heavily to the left, and made a mental note to fix it. He'd been sitting barely two minutes when he heard Baby cry out in pain and was jolted right back to his feet.

He scampered back toward the field, but tripped in a rut in his yard before he could get there. He fell to his stomach hard, which made him vomit chunks of two half-digested pepperoni Hot Pockets. His hand pressed into his regurgitated food as he pushed himself up, but he didn't care. He scurried on, his right hand dripping and his right foot missing its Croc. *Where's my baby?*

He wanted to scream, but all that came out was a horrible wheeze. The tar in his

lungs rattled. Gus, the neighbor's Mastiff, kept his jaws tight around the bloody mass within them. October kicked desperately at the dog, but his foot barely knocked a strand of fur from his burly body. October lit a cigarette, inhaling deeply before shooting a stream of grieving smoke toward the purpling sky. Gus wagged his tail lazily. October snarled incomprehensible curses and pressed the glowing end of his cigarette into the dog's large, moist nose; Gus yelped, dropped his plaything, and slinked away, whimpering. October fell to his knees and squeezed Baby to his chest. *She's breathing!* He held her lifeless body at arm's length to inspect her. She only slumped a little, her head falling back sharply. October looked up.

"Yes, a beautiful sky, isn't it, Baby?"

He put her body in his mini-fridge, which he opened multiple times throughout the evening in order to speak to her.

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"You know what they'll do with it, October?"

"I don't want to know," he groaned, rubbing Sunny's stomach in small, circular motions as he longed to hold the baby within.

"They'll put it in a fridge so it won't spoil. That way they can study it and do all kinds of experiments."

"I'll kill myself, Sunny."

"Of course you won't, not when you have a sweet little kitty waiting for you," she murmured, forcing his head between her thighs.

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He buried Baby under the porch when the moon was high and a light rain was falling. *Fitting.* For the first time in a month, he went to bed alone. Falling asleep was difficult without Baby's soft, comforting fur resting in the fold of his elbow. When sleep finally came, it was fitful, and he woke early, when the sun was barely hovering above the horizon. He sat on the floor beside his bed and lifted the mattress, peering at the shotgun laying beneath. *You're a coward. You've never been able to do it. What makes you feel any braver today? My babies.* His wrinkles became waterslides.

He sat on the couch, tucked safely between the broken springs, with the stock pressed between his knees and his lips wrapped around the barrel. His eyes were closed, and he was ready. *Daddy's coming.*

October's eyes snapped open as his brain registered an unfamiliar sound: footsteps. He pulled the shotgun from his mouth, hoisted himself to his feet, and cautiously approached the door. A woman in a business suit was standing on the porch. Her blonde hair was tucked into a smooth bun, which she kept fingering; she was nervous.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I, okay, um. Could you put the gun down, please?"

He obliged, leaning it against the doorframe.

"Thank you. Are you October Jacobs?"

He nodded. *She almost looks like—*

"I've been searching for you for a long time."

He opened his mouth, then closed it again. She tried to laugh, but it came out more like a bray. *That almost sounds like—*

"Let me explain. I grew up without my dad. Mom bounced around from guy to guy like it was her job. It *was* her job, I suppose. It kept us fed. Anyway, she would never tell me who my real dad was. She died five years ago, but just before she passed, she finally told me. My dad is *you*, October."

"Sunny? She didn't . . . there wasn't . . . she told me she was having an abortion."

"I'm here, Daddy."

October closed his eyes to repress his tears. *Here's my baby.* He felt blindly for his camping chair and fell into it, nearly collapsing. He took a deep breath before opening his eyes again, but his vision was blurred.

The old broom clattered to the ground.